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UNHCR'S INSPECTION PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Inspector General's Office is located within the Executive Office, reporting directly to the High Commissioner. The Inspector General is also the focal point for investigations in UNHCR and acts as Secretariat for the Oversight Committee, which ensures effective review and follow-up of oversight reports, including audit reports.

2. This report covers developments in inspection and investigation over the last twelve months, as well as inspection plans for the rest of 2001.

II. INSPECTIONS

3. Inspections provide the High Commissioner with comprehensive and systematic assessments of UNHCR operations, focusing on those factors, both internal and external to UNHCR, considered most relevant to the effective and efficient discharge of UNHCR's responsibilities. Inspections cover all aspects of UNHCR's field operations, including internal management (individual confidential interviews with all staff at each field location), external relations (meetings with UNHCR's key government, United Nations and non-governmental organization (NGO) counterparts and members of the diplomatic community to obtain their assessment of UNHCR's performance and the country team's strengths and weaknesses), the views of refugees, and the overall appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives of the field operation and actions taken to achieve them. UNHCR inspections are thus broadly analogous to the inspectorates of some national diplomatic services. Inspections also

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provide UNHCR's field offices with an independent and objective review of their performance, where necessary, as well as a second opinion on difficult issues and recommendations for improvements and action to overcome constraints, often drawing on the best practices or solutions seen in other inspections.

4. The cycle of each inspection begins several weeks before the mission, with detailed briefings of the team at Headquarters, the completion of confidential individual questionnaires by all staff in the field location, and the completion of a comprehensive operations and administrative questionnaire by the field office. The mission itself ends with a debriefing of the senior staff of the field office and a discussion of the draft recommendations. This is followed by debriefings at Headquarters and the presentation of the report and recommendations to the High Commissioner. Once approved by the High Commissioner, a formal follow up mechanism is set in motion to monitor the implementation of recommendations.

5. UNHCR has offices in some 120 countries. Depending on the size of the operation being inspected, and the number of locations where UNHCR has staff, an inspection team comprises between two and four staff from the Inspector General's Office and one colleague with knowledge of region-specific protection issues, seconded to the team from the Department of International Protection.

6. In 2000, the High Commissioner agreed that inspections of smaller operations could be led by the most senior inspection officer, rather than all inspections being led by the Inspector General. This provided increased capacity to achieve the goal of inspecting each UNHCR country programme every four or five years. The initial plan approved by the High Commissioner for 2000/2001 had to be significantly modified in the second half of the year, when priority was given to conducting inquiries into the murders in September of UNHCR staff in Indonesia and Guinea. Nevertheless, by the end of July 2001, a total of 100 countries will have been inspected since 1995.

7. Inspections over the last 12 months covered operations in India, Kenya (Regional Service Centre and Branch Office), Lebanon, the Netherlands, Ukraine and Yemen. Between 1 June and 31 December 2001, inspections of field operations in Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Columbia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malawi, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Republic of the Congo, the Russian Federation, Tunisia, Venezuela, Zambia and Zimbabwe will be conducted.

8. Observations from recent inspections on issues concerning field and, in particular, national staff were presented to the Senior Management Committee in August 2000. Summary analyses of recurrent findings from inspection missions are provided to UNHCR's senior management for the purpose of drawing lessons learned and taking appropriate action. A report on observations from inspections during the period from March 1999 to March 2001 was recently prepared for the High Commissioner and UNHCR staff and is being made available on the UNHCR's public website. This report covers a number of areas and issues affecting both UNHCR staff and operations. These range from the regularization of the status of UNHCR country offices, especially when host governments are

party to international instruments and/or are members of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, to aspects of reinforcing coordination with national and international counterparts and issues concerning improvement of internal management of offices, including measures to ensure staff security and control mechanisms.

III. INVESTIGATIONS

9. As focal point for investigations, the Inspector General is also responsible for ensuring investigation of alleged or suspected wrongdoing, including misuse of UNHCR funds, resources or facilities, abuse of authority, harassment, or any other illegal or improper conduct involving UNHCR staff or funds. The post of Investigations Coordinator is dedicated to this function. Depending on their nature, investigations are conducted by the UNHCR Audit Section of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the OIOS investigation Section, or by using other resources. The outcome is either a referral for disciplinary action, prosecution before a local court, or closure of the case, where the charges are determined to be unfounded.

10. Over the last year, a total of 13 inquiries were conducted, including cases of harassment, theft, fraud and breach of confidentiality. At the request of the High Commissioner, priority was given to conduct inquiries into the murders of UNHCR staff in Indonesia and Guinea in September 2000. The summary reports of these inquiries were made public on UNHCR's website in December 2000. Other major investigations concerned cases of irregularities in refugee status determination and resettlement processes. In the last quarter of 2000, due to limited investigation resources within UNHCR and complexities of the case, the Inspector General asked the OIOS Investigation Section to investigate allegations of irregularities in UNHCR's Office in Kenya. Their final report will be presented to the United Nations General Assembly. UNHCR and OIOS will conduct a lessons learned review on completion of this investigation and further necessary action will be determined thereafter. In the meantime, UNHCR is in the process of finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation with OIOS Investigations Section.

11. During 2000, UNHCR cooperated closely with the Joint Inspection Unit in the preparation of its report "Strengthening the Investigations Function in the United Nations System Organisations" (JIU/REP/2000/9, available on the JIU website at www.unsystem.org/jiu). The report concluded by highlighting the necessity of reinforcing the investigation function in the United Nations system.